

mural goes up at Sacramento State telling the - Sacramento Bee, The (CA) - August 20, 2019 - page 4A

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The first Filipino migration-themed mural in Sacramento was completed over the weekend at Sacramento State, a week before fall classes start.

The project is a part of Wide Open Walls, the nation's largest mural festival, which returned to Sacramento for a third year. The event featured 44 artists and 30 new murals in the Sacramento region.

Eliseo Art Silva, a Los Angeles-based artist who moved to the United States with his family 30 years ago, designed and painted the Sac State mural in 10 days.

The theme of the mural is "Together We Rise," to tell the central role of women in the Filipino story of migration and neighborly cooperation, Silva said. "It is about honoring our ancestors and our history both in the Philippines and the United States."

Vince Sales, who oversees the Philippine National Day Association's LahiARTS program, pitched the idea of a mural dedicated to the Filipino community in Sacramento to David Sobon, founder of Wide Open Walls, as well as the university.

"They had a notion of creating an outdoor type of museum," Sales said.

Timothy Fong, professor of ethnic studies at Sacramento State, said the event is important because Filipino American history is significant to the Central Valley.

"Filipino Americans are the largest ethnic group on campus," Fong said. "I can easily use this mural when I talk about Filipino farmworkers and Filipino Americans in California and be able to highlight a mural on campus as evidence."

Dressed in the Barong Tagalog, a traditional embroidered formal shirt, Silva explained the ideas and history behind the mural, recalling the dates, numbers and names in detail. He said the hands of the mother and the child, which are holding fans, symbolize the stories of the parents and children woven in the Filipino and Filipino American narrative.

"One hand signifies Filipino women who left their kids in the Philippines to work as nannies and caregivers in other countries," Silva said. The other hand signifies families who strive to blend in after moving to the United States and forget about the Filipino stories.

On the right side of the mural are two symbols of Philippine mythology, including the Sarimanok, the guardian of the sun and moon that determines the harvest season and appears in the form of a bird with a fish on its beak. The Naga, the guardian for a lake that determines planting season, is

presented in the form of a serpent, according to Silva.

The inspiration for the artwork came from Silva's personal experience and observation of the Filipino community in America. Instead of giving up one culture for the other, he hopes Filipinos can connect both cultures.

"I wanted future migrants in this country to not experience the same dilemma that my own family had to go through," he said. "That is the idea of not valuing your own stories, your own traditions in your own country and only replacing that with another culture entirely. And I believe we should choose the best of both worlds and look at the bigger picture, and what will work when you migrate and move to another country, because there will be good and bad in both countries."

Community engagement distinguished this mural from others. Youth members recited self-written poems that were inspired by the theme of the mural and drew their interpretation of their migration stories on fabrics that were pasted on the mural.

Edmari Gutierrez, a senior at Sacramento State, recited a poem she wrote about her grandmother at the event. She said she felt honored to have her poem chosen as a part of what the mural represents.

"Once school starts, it (the mural) is something that will turn heads on campus, and hopefully some students will be intrigued enough to look at it, study it and learn about the inspirations behind it," Gutierrez said.

Eliseo's work was one of the three murals that went up at Sacramento State this year. Hoxhoh, Miami-based artist, and Los Angeles-based Jilian Evelyn also brought also brought their unique styles to campus buildings.

Sheree Meyer, the dean of the College of Arts and Letters of Sacramento State University, said she was excited about having a mural on campus dedicated to the Filipino and Filipino American experience.

"While the details may be unique, there are many individuals on our campus who have had similar experiences," Meyer said. "In this mural, as in our college, we take history and combine it with the arts, which gives multiple expressions to the story. It's a perfect combination."

With the artistic goal of reconciling the history of his lineage with the history of painting, Silva said he is moving back to the Philippines next year to work on a mural project for the 400th anniversary of a school he attended.

"Every migrant who comes to America should offer something new from their culture, and create something to advance the culture of America," Silva said. "And the only way you can do it is to embrace your own culture."

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